

TENTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE



# The Shoal

A Literary and Art Journal by  
The Gifford Street Writers  
Falmouth High School  
2013-2014

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## On the Cover

*Foxglove* by Eliza Monty

*Eliza is a senior who loves theater, art, and poetry. She is famous on the Internet and hopes to one day marry for money.*

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# A Booth Fit to Fall in Love

*Ruth Fuller*

The diner lights flicker  
Whispering the names of the people below  
The dreamers and the dreamless, side by side  
And the six who work there behind the glass counter  
Watching for something to talk about

A man steps inside  
A look of anxious patience on his young face  
Twenty-two years old, I'd say  
Probably went to a good college and met a good girl  
But decided "good" wasn't good enough  
Probably doesn't drink too much  
And smiles like he means it  
He replies with "I'm waiting for someone"  
When asked if he'd like a booth or table.

His shirt looks soft  
A faded green that's found comfort in its age  
Faint cologne, dusting the air around it  
Hands that can't decide between pockets or crossed across the chest

It must be the second date  
Because when she enters, his gaze says I know you  
And they embrace each other like lovers who just don't know it yet

She's beautiful in a frayed-blue-jeans kind of way  
With features that whisper she's never told a lie  
Not much makeup  
Just enough to turn a head or two  
She laughs like she's known love  
But only the edges of it

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Smiles like she's dusting the air with hope  
And doesn't know any better

He picks a booth  
Faded red leather  
A few cracks and worn spots  
But trustworthy, nonetheless  
A booth fit to fall in love

She smiles with genuine amusement  
At the little jukebox on the table  
Makes a confession that she's always wanted one  
A jukebox  
A real one

He makes a promise that he'll get her one  
if she goes on another date with him

She smiles:

The curious kind  
Wondering if he really would  
From a distance I can't hear the words  
But I know them, somehow  
Maybe because she is my future  
And he is my past  
Maybe because I've met them both in different forms  
The girl, in the mirror,  
And the boy, in my arms  
And though the man and women beside me,  
Holding dirty trays of empty plates,  
Are betting on how fast the date will end,  
I'm watching a fireworks show  
And wondering if I was right about love all along.

*Ruth is a sophomore. She loves the movie Up more than anyone will ever understand. This poem was inspired by my summer working at Betsy's Diner as the takeout girl, watching people go in and out and catching glimpses of their lives.*



## Winter Cellos

*Ashley Sheehy*

*Ashley is a senior who likes to create art using ceramics, watercolor, music and, most importantly, photography.*

# The Only Other One Who Knows Is My Brother Christopher

*Michael Wheeler*

The only one who knows is my brother Christopher, a year younger than I am. Resembling a mouse, with a cheeky face and brown eyes, people have said he's my chubby miniature. The moment I came out to him remains etched in my mind: camping out down a long stretch of shore. Everyone was sitting at picnic tables, just over the dunes facing the beach, talking freely. Naturally, among the boys in my troop, the topic of discussion was girls.

"I love going to track meets, just to watch the girls," said one boy. "They look smoking in their running shorts."

"No way, man," said another. "The cheerleaders are the best, hands down. Have you seen their outfits?"

I sat silently, staring off in the distance as Chris laughed along with them. Their visions of girls weren't very captivating to me. I gave up feigning interest a long time ago. Chris looked up from the group.

"Sammy, wanna head down to the beach?"

Ascending the dune, I saw the endless stretch of Atlantic beach, a clear view of the vast expanse of sea in front of us, spread out all the way beyond the horizon. The sun was dipping down, painting vivid hues of fire across the canvas of the sky. We both ran down the sandy slope and plopped in the sand, halfway between the dune and the water. We watched the shimmering waves break against the sand, keeping it forever smooth. He turned to face me.

"Sammy, can I ask you something?"

"Sure, what's up?"

"Well, there's something that's been bothering me for a while now."

"What is it?" He looked away. "Chris, just tell me what's up. It can't be that bad."

"You promise you won't get mad at me?"

"Promise."

He sat silently, running his fingers through the sand. I felt a breeze on my neck, blowing in with the tide.

He looked up. "Are-- are you gay?"

I blinked, not quite sure how to answer. "What do you mean?"

"You know, gay. Like, do you like other guys?"

The cogs in my head stopped turning. I'd never thought about it at all, much less been asked by someone else. My mouth hung open as I fished for words.

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"I'm sorry Sammy, that wasn't an insult, honest. I was just curious. There are some things about you that seemed-- well, a little queer."

"Like what?"

"Well, you never seem interested in girls. When we were all talking back there, you didn't say anything. Plus, when you look at other guys, you sometimes stare at them like..."

I tried to reason my way out of it. My mind flashed back to boys I knew in school. Maybe I did look at them differently. Maybe, just a little bit, I liked what I saw of them. Still, I reasoned, I couldn't be gay. Could I?

"Sammy, I'm sorry. I didn't mean what I said. I'll never bring it up again to anyone. Just please don't be angry with me, okay?" Nervousness grew in his voice as he spoke.

"Hey, relax. I'm not upset."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, it's just that I-- I don't really know. I guess you're right. I mean, I look at other guys a lot because there are things that I like about them, but, like, not in a gay way or anything. You know what I mean?"

He gave me a sideways look. "Uhh...No, not really."

I floundered for the right way to describe what I meant. "You know how you and the others like to talk about girls a lot? I've never really liked the things that you like in girls. They're just not very exciting for me."

"What are you getting at?"

"I mean, I guess you could say that those are the things I like about guys. Their clothes, the way they look, their features, well..."

Even though my brother saw it coming, it still hit me like a train.

"I think that I might be gay."

Chris gaped at me. His eyes were wide with shock at hearing me say it.

"Umm..." he said, and turned suddenly to face the ocean.

We sat in silence. The waves were the only source of sound. Worst-case scenarios began building in my mind: Does he think I'm a freak? Is he going to stop talking to me? Is he going to tell Mom and Dad? My pudgy little mouse of a brother just became my biggest fear.

I finally turned to him. "Hey Bro?"

"Yeah Sammy?"

"You don't think I'm a freak now, do you?"

He read the fear in my eyes, and his face softened. "No, not at all. Why would I?"

"I don't know. You just seemed put off."

"Well, it surprised me a little. I guess it's just, when I asked, I didn't think that you would say yes. Not that it really matters that much. You're still the same person

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I've always known.”

“Thanks Chris, that means a lot.” I breathed a huge sigh.

He smiled, and then started to laugh. “I mean, you were always a freak, even before I thought you were gay. Nothing’s changed at all.”

I burst out laughing, and started after him. He tried to move away, but I grabbed his arm, pulling him towards me. My hand balled into a fist. I grinded my knuckles into his head, causing him to squeal and writhe against me. At last he broke free of my grasp, grinning at me as he tumbled over in the sand. I laughed alongside him, watching him shake sand out of his hair.

“You’re lucky I didn’t give you a dunk in the ocean for that!”

The sun, crimson red, finally sank below the horizon, as we sat there on the empty shore, worlds away from anyone else.

*Michael is a sophomore. This piece is an excerpt from an incomplete novel.*



## Pond Life

*Tommi Gans*

*Tommi is a junior.*



## **Big, Bad Wolf**

*Jessie Edgar*

*Jessie is a junior who loves to do ceramics in addition to singing and playing the piano.*

# Things Happen

*Becky Hopkins*

He is going to walk down the hall  
Witnessing high school tumult  
With cool eyes and steady gait  
Approaching our spot  
At a withdrawn and leisurely pace,

Maybe preparing inside his mind  
His next facial expression.  
I do that also:  
Next I'll show  
Flirty innocent surprise:  
Raise widened eyes to his face  
Part lips one half inch.  
In truth, I am not that good at life,  
For often in the ending,  
I seem more like seductive house fly  
Than adorable female.

Under my mind and under bed sheets  
I understand that I'm not above  
A little flirting,

So when his lips curl like the finger  
Of an innocent newborn  
And he bids me good morning,  
I must flip on my Attractive Switch.

Shirt pulled down my chest  
Hair framing my face  
He's privileged to see me  
Strut  
In my most alluring strides  
Just for him.

I smile back,  
But my butt sways weirdly out of step,  
And my legs, in an feline attempt,  
Cross,  
Feeling like a girl  
In Mommy's tall four inch heels  
I stumble, just a bit, on the toes  
I'd forgotten were clumsy  
The moment I tried to be sexy.

We both observed the other,  
Standing, still under fluorescent lights,  
A road hazard to the traffic,  
My lips, curled downwards,  
Roll up with his pair's light curve,  
And as he left I heard his footsteps  
Among the shuffling chaos  
Of human cattle  
On linoleum flooring.

*Becky is an avid bubble enthusiast with a 4 year-old hermit crab named Shelly. Her 16 years of experience have prepared her well for a life as a misunderstood street musician.*



## The Zipper

*Sarah McBride*

*Sarah is a senior.*

# Cats Don't Betray You

*Molly Lemay*

*Cats don't betray you.*

That was Officer Howard Kelly's reply whenever someone asked him why—why he needed 150 lbs. of cat litter, why he needed another new cat toy, why he had no money because he was broke from paying the vet. Of course he did not say that answer out loud. If he did, he'd be judged, marked as a sad, lonely man, and probably even called crazy. He told those who asked him that his cats were just high maintenance. Which wasn't a lie, they were high maintenance. He just conveniently left out the fact that there were ten of them.

It's not like that's a big deal—they were his children and he loved every single one of them. He took care of them, fed them, played with them, cleaned their litter boxes, and brought them to the vet for yearly check-ups (he visited several vets—if he visited ten times with a different cat each time, he'd get looks, even from those supposed animal lovers who worked there). In return, they kept him from feeling lonely, they made him happy, and they never, ever betrayed him.

His colleagues down at the station jokingly call him "Catman" sometimes. They think it's hilarious that he has pet cats ("Two," he told them once, "I have two cats—Sam and Oliver") and many admit that they would have never pegged him as a cat person. He laughs along when they joke about the subject, but it's painful for him. It reminds him of the jokes he and his old partner used to make, back before his partner shot him and ran, almost leaving him out of commission.

Whenever that memory came up, he tried to ignore it. After all, he had his cats now and his cats would never betray him like that. They were there, keeping him company when the memories kept him from working, when they became so vivid that his shoulder burned where the bullet entered it, when the nightmares came and all he could see was his partner's face twisted into that unforgiving grin, leering at him as if he was nothing more than a cockroach about to be squashed by the heavy combat boot holding him down as the gun was shoved against his back, ready to be fired.

His cats wouldn't hurt him like that. His cats are safe, they protect him. They distract him, keeping him from thinking, from remembering. They comfort him when his resolve falls and his tears start to fall. They fill up the hole in his life that was ripped by the claws of betrayal. And at the end of the day, they are what keep him going until the end of the week.

Because, after all, cats don't betray you.

*Molly is a senior. She's an active member of the band, a member of the National Art Honor Society, and senior editor of The Shoal.*

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## Camel Bowl

*Anna Adams*

*Anna is a junior and currently enrolled in Ceramics 3 and Honors Studio Art.*

## Claws

*Emily Turner*

*Emily is a senior who enjoys soccer, lacrosse, music, reading, and art.*



# Lost in the Cosmos

*Wei-Ren Murray*

It was a strange distorted sort of beauty. As I strolled down the deserted street, the faint pitter patter of my shoes upon the frozen asphalt was the only sound to be heard against the dark vacuum of the night. And I was the only soul, in the entire world it seemed, with ears to hear the echoing melody. There are people who grow up afraid of the dark. What they fear is the dusky unknown just beyond their grasp. Too often it is mysterious beauty mistaken for evil. But that night I let the night hold me in its silky embrace, and like two friends reunited at length, we rejoiced at each other's company.

Above my head glowed a canopy of twinkling lights. From a distant galaxy millions and trillions of light years away, the tiny place we inhabited probably seemed insignificant to those regal bodies high above. Yet they deemed to grace our inky sky with their majestic beauty all the same. And I found myself the sole witness to what seemed like a horribly considerate offering from somewhere too far beyond for my brain to even comprehend.

I existed only in the echoes of my footsteps, the rustling of my clothes, the faint rush of air from my gently pursed mouth. In the pale glow of the waning moon I was but a specter, wandering aimlessly through the maze of streets. Eventually I found myself perched upon the wooden planks of a moldering old bench. I was content to sit there, my fingers absentmindedly tracing the grain of the wood while my eyes fell upon the lights of the ships bobbing in the harbor against the horizon beyond.

Idling in the perfection of that moment, what reason did I have to think that I was on the brink of the precipice?

So when your footsteps joined the somber symphony of the night, I was startled out of my reverie and sent plummeting from my fanciful vision back to the cold stark world from which I had escaped. As your footsteps grew ever closer, the dread in my heart crescendoed and the knot in my stomach grew tighter. I wanted to tell myself that it was just a lovely night. Perhaps you just wanted to join me in the fleeting beauty. Perhaps you, like me, had felt the magical spell of the night and couldn't resist the pull.

But I knew the truth, heard it echoing deep in the sound of your feet against the pavement, a sharp dissonant noise. I saw it in the looming shadow you cast against the night.

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When you looked up from your dragging feet, your eyes met mine. You didn't need to explain that the bright future you'd spoken of so extensively had crumbled to dust in your hands. You didn't need words to tell me that you were the only remaining half of the seemingly perfect match. You didn't have to open your mouth for me to know that your heart, once buoyant in your chest, was now mangled and dying and no longer able to fill the cavernous hole in your body.

When you looked at me, that was all it took, and the last bit of strength you had disappeared, spirited away on the gentle breeze. Though you towered above me, in that moment I had to be the bigger one, and I took you in my arms. Holding you to my chest, I felt your body wracked with sobs that wanted nothing more than to escape. Your cries broke the silence around us before melting into the night. I didn't know what to do with you so vulnerable and broken in my arms.

What could I say to stave off the darkness closing in on you? What could be done to end the flood of tears?

For a moment I hated myself for being so lost, completely unable to save you. In my confusion, I resolved simply to hold you tighter, as if the love of my embrace could do anything to hold off the encroaching demons. And so we sat there together, our sadness illuminated by the most beautiful night.

*Wei-Ren is a sophomore.*



## Birds

*Marcus Dalpe*

*Marcus is a sophomore. In his spare time, he enjoys playing tennis, painting, and drawing. He wishes to pursue a career in art.*

# Untitled

*Kaitlin McManus*

She stands, eyes closed,  
Seeing nothing but shadows.  
A deep breath,  
Inhaling the intoxicating  
Poisons of life  
As she's left empty and alone,  
Her worn shoe scuffing the broken earth  
Her toes peering over the edge,  
Dancing with the darkness below.  
Arms folded, her fingers tear at the shirt  
Caked with the dirt and disappointment  
Of stumbles and falls  
Running blind through the strangled branches  
Closing in, scratching and pulling  
At her bare legs, racing through the gloom  
But never finding the light of day.  
Her nails find the surface  
Of her starved skin  
Digging into the lasting scars,  
Letting the crimson petals bloom and fall  
Bringing life to her blank visage.  
Her eyes spring open  
With a sharp intake of air,  
She looks towards the sky  
As she stands ready to jump  
Waiting to fall  
But wanting to fly.

*Kaitlin McManus is a sophomore.*

# Invasion

*Sean Quinn*

The earth is under attack. Not from meteors the size of Texas or green Martians with tinfoil hats either; this threat is much closer to home. The invader is the creases and crumples--the wrinkles that are set on annihilating the known world one shirt at a time.

Wrinkles are sneaky attackers, striking when you would least expect them to. After getting up from my chair at a social gathering, to my horror, I discover I have been violated. Small creases in my previously smooth shirt creep and crawl from my belt to my sleeves. Frantically, I battle for my life, pulling my shirt taut and vigorously rubbing the infected sight with the palm of my hand. My attempts to save myself are futile; the invasion continues, and no one seems to notice the dramatic warfare occurring over my torso. The wrinkles are so clever that most people have been brainwashed to accept their presence.

Wrinkles have even infiltrated the leaders of our society, secretly waiting for the moment to strike. They have been sighted on our celebrities, our politicians, our leaders. No one is exempt from the wicked power they possess.

And so, I wage my own war against them. I have determined that their headquarters is located in my dresser drawers. No folded shirt has ever returned from that sorry place alive, brutally beaten into a crumpled ball. I've taken precautions in my assault, determined to destroy the wrinkles once and for all.

I am wearing a nylon shirt so I cannot be infected, or so I hope. I have a laundry bag in my left hand and a hot iron in my right. The iron is set to "high: cotton." No messing around here. With a quick prayer for protection and a last look at a picture of my family, I stealthily approach my dresser while singing the Mission: Impossible theme under my breath.

I somersault to the dresser and fling the drawer open. The corpse of crumpled shirts fill the drawer to overflowing. Bam! Bam! I rescue the shirts and Medivac them into my laundry bag. With my iron, I beat back the remaining wrinkles with steam and pressure.

The enemy vanquished, I release I sigh of relief, until I notice my crinkled papers sneaking out of my backpack.

*Sean is a senior.*

# Come Back

*Isaiah Lineaweaver*

Come back  
I don't care where,  
Just return to what you were,  
Become who you said you were going to be  
For yourself  
Don't do it for me.  
I don't govern your emotions  
I am not in control of your motions.  
You are you for a reason  
Do what's pleasing  
What pleases you,  
Only you can tell yourself what to do,  
Continue, But when it is through, it is through.  
You can handle  
Fill the bath, light a candle  
Soothe the ripples  
Fulfill your improbable fantasy,  
A mirage is what you see.  
Your smile is covered by the clouds of deception  
Being wrong was your best correction.

*Isaiah is a junior. "I grow old ... I grow old ... I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled." T. S. Eliot, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Other Poems*

# Dog-Sitting

*Dan Morrison*

Marvin Circle is barely half a mile around, but the walk feels a lot longer at night. There are only a handful of streetlamps, and most of the neighbors have already turned off their porch lights and gone to bed. In several places, the trees growing along the roadside form thick canopies overhead, blocking out any moonlight and leaving the street in darkness. The road itself is poorly paved and full of potholes, waiting to trip the unwary pedestrian. No one is driving this late; I can stay in the center of the street, avoiding the shadowy edges where the pavement meets the undergrowth.

Rio strains against his leash. He doesn't seem to notice the darkness, and I envy him for it. I am paid to walk him three times a day—early morning, afternoon, and night—and in the past week, his behavior has not changed. He greets me at the door in a state of complete exuberance. After I've refilled his bowl, he eats with such vigor that he doesn't notice when I leave. And on his walks, he is never content to stay at my side. Instead, he lunges forward against the pull of the leash, pressing his body flat to the ground and scrabbling ahead over the rough pavement. When he finds something that catches his interest, he pursues it with single-minded tenacity. On several occasions, captivated by a sound or a smell, he has planted himself on the side of the road and refused to move entirely, determined to locate the source.

To Rio, the dark is no obstacle. Unfortunately, this means that there's no way for me to speed up the walking process—he's going to investigate everything he finds, whether I like it or not. I have to wait for him while he goes about his business. It's eerie, standing alone in the road, far from the welcoming glow of the streetlamps. There are no sounds from either the woods or the houses. The insects have died down with the setting sun, the birds are roosting, and the cars are tucked away in driveways and garages. Even Rio is quiet; he stands frozen at the edge of the street, trying to regain some lost scent.

The silence is unnerving. I tug gently on Rio's leash, then harder, desperate to get him moving again and hear his feet against the pavement. He reluctantly allows himself to be dragged down the road, twisting his head back in a vain bid to follow the scent. I forge ahead into the darkness, trying not to picture what might be lurking in the underbrush or waiting around the next bend. The silence has made me jumpy—I can't rein in my imagination. Even Rio, finally, is perturbed—he stops pulling against the leash and comes to heel at my side. The oppressive quiet is broken only by our footsteps.

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I make it back to Rio's house unscathed. I leave him a bowl of food, turn out the kitchen light, and head back to my car, still half-fearing that something will be in it waiting for me. Every horror story I've ever heard has bubbled to the forefront of my mind. The darkness and the silence have set me on edge.

Once home, the fear begins to subside. I berate myself for being such a coward. I know that there is no rational basis for my sudden panic. On the dog walk, the greatest threat to my well-being is the risk of twisting my ankle in a pothole. But in the darkness and the silence, some primitive childhood drive resurfaces, the part of the brain that believes in the monster under the bed and hears something scratching at the window. I don't think it will ever truly leave me, no matter how old I am—there's always that tiny part of me that's scared of the dark.

*Dan is a junior who loves writing, music, and drama.*



## Staring Down Hercules

*Ashley Rose Sylvia*

*Ashley is a realist and wants to see the colors of another sky.*

# The Shoal

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A **shoal** is a shallow nutrient-rich refuge in a body of water. While the shoal can beach the greatest of ships, it also can nurture the smallest of the ocean's creatures. The Gifford Street Writers is likewise a place where we find nourishment in the company of our peers. *The Shoal* showcases our haven and growth in the life of artists and writers at Falmouth High School.

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